

PLAIN  
DIRECTIONS  
For Reading the  
Holy Scripture.

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Homil. upon Reading the Holy  
Scripture.

*There is nothing that more maintaineth Godliness of the Mind, and driveth away Ungodliness, than doth the continual Reading and Hearing of God's Word, if it be joined with a godly Mind, and a good Affection to know and follow God's Will. For without a single Eye, pure Intent, and good Mind, nothing is allowed for Good before God. And on the other side, nothing more darkeneth CHRIST and the Glory of God, nor bringeth in more Blindness, and all Kinds of Vices, than doth the Ignorance of God's Word.*

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Enlarged.

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## Homil. upon Reading the Ho- ly Scripture.



*S* they that are Sick of any Ague, whatsoever they eat or drink, (though it be never so pleasant) yet it is as bitter to them as Wormwood; not for the Bitterness of the Meat, but for the corrupt and bitter Humour that is in their Tongue and Mouth. Even so is the Sweetness of God's Word bitter, not of it self, but only unto them that have their Minds corrupted with long Custom of Sin, and Love of this World.

*In reading of God's Word, he most profiteth that is most turned into it, that is, most inspired with the Holy Ghost, most in his Heart and Life altered and changed into that Thing which he readeth. He that is daily less and less proud, less wrathful, less covetous, and less desirous of worldly and vain Pleasures.*

*Although other Sciences be good, and to be learned, yet no Man can deny but this (the Knowledge of God's Word) is the chief, and passeth all other incomparably. What Excuse shall we therefore make at the last Day before Christ, that delight to read or hear Men's Phantasies and Inventions more than his most Holy Gospel, and will find no Time to do that, which chiefly (above all Things) we should do; and will rather*

read other Things than that for the which we ought, rather to leave Reading of all other Things.

Ignorance of God's Word is the Cause of all Error, as Christ himself affirmed to the Sadducees. How should they then eschew Error, that will be still Ignorant? And how should they come out of Ignorance that will not read nor hear that Thing which should give them Knowledge?

Read it humbly, with a meek and lowly Heart, to the Intent you may glorify God, and not your self with the Knowledge of it, and read it not without daily Praying to God, that he would direct your Reading to good Effect; and take upon you to expouna it no further, than you can plainly understand it. For (as St. Augustine says) the Knowledge of Holy Scripture is a great, large, and a high Palace, but the Door is very low, so that the high and arrogant Man cannot run in; but he must stoop low, and humble himself, that shall enter into it. Presumption and Arrogance is the Mother of all Error; and Humility needeth to fear no Error.

Chrysostome says, 'That Man's humane and worldly Wisdom or Science leadeth not to the Understanding of Scripture, but the Revelation of the Holy Ghost, who inspireth the true Meaning unto them, that with Humility and Diligence do search therefore.'



P L A I D



PLAIN  
DIRECTIONS  
For Reading the  
*Holy Scripture.*



INCE God of his Fatherly Goodness hath revealed himself, and the Way to eternal Life, in the Holy Scriptures; it is certainly the Duty of every Christian, to study the same with all Seriousness and Application. But then he ought to study them after such a Manner, as may enable him thereby to obtain a *saving Knowledge of CHRIST*, that, as the Scripture it self expresses it, he

## 6 Plain Directions

may be thereby made *Wise unto Salvation* <sup>ing of</sup> *through Faith which is in Christ Jesus.* (a)

§ 2. When therefore any Person resolves to read the Scripture of the *Old* or *New* Testament, with a sincere Desire to have his Soul wrought upon, reformed and improved by it, with a saving Knowledge of *JESUS CHRIST*; the following *Plain Directions* may, by the Blessing of God, prove serviceable for that End.

§ 3. That a serious *Reader* of the divine Scripture, may the better *prepare* himself for attaining that End, for which the Scripture is given; he ought in the first place to lay aside all manner of sinister *By-Ends*, apt to intrude into the best and most sacred Performances. He must watch all the Motions of his Heart, lest some irregular End should secretly move him, and beguiling him under some false Pretence or other, turn his Mind from that *Christian Simplicity*, which is so necessary for the profitable Reading

on ing of the Scripture. If this Caution be neglected, and the Reader influenced by *uncertain Designs* in so pious an Exercise, then he must needs fall short of that Benefit, which would undoubtedly accrue to his Soul, if he did perform so useful a Work with due Care and Application, like a faithful and attentive Disciple of our Saviour.

§ 4. It was one of those false and *selfish Ends*, that influenced the *Pharisees* of old, and hindered them from Reaping that saving Effect from the Study of Scripture, which, to a well-disposed Reader, is offer'd therein. They seemed indeed to search the Scripture with extraordinary Care and Nicety, but missing the principal *End*, for which the Scripture is given, they continued under the reigning Power of Sin; and all the laborious Searches they made in the Letter thereof, came to nothing. Nay, they even turned that into Poison, which, if well digested, would have proved wholesome Nourishment for the Good of their Souls. The Cause of this unprofitable Way of Reading the Scripture, is intimated by our Lord, when he

tells them, (b) *They thought to have e~~thod~~  
ternal Life in the Scriptures: but they  
would not come to Christ, that they might  
have Life*; that is, That they might  
be justified by his Merit, cleansed  
by his Blood, born again by his Spi-  
rit, sanctified by his Grace, and so  
saved in that *Order and Method*, which  
the Lord hath prescribed in his Word.

§ 5. This *Incompliance* of the Scribes  
and Pharisees with the Terms of Sal-  
vation required by Jesus Christ, proved  
the very Cause of their eternal Ruin.  
They imagined they might inherit the  
Kingdom of God, barely by searching  
the Writings of *Moses*, and of the  
Prophets, without coming to Christ,  
or believing in his Name. They re-  
jected his Person and Doctrine, for  
worldly Honour and Interest: And  
therefore the Lord told them plainly,  
that *they should perish and die in their  
Sins*; (c) This being the common  
Doom of all false Professors and Hypo-  
crites, who, whilst they dwell and rest  
upon the *Letter and Outside* of the Scrip-  
ture, despise that divine *Order and Me-  
thod*,

ethod, wherein Life and Salvation is only to be obtained.

§ 6. Another *false Step* in the Study of the Scripture, is taken by those, who read the Bible with no other Intent, than to pick out something to entertain their *Fancy*, and to pass away the *Time*, for Want of other *Employment*. Human Reason is, after the Fall of Man, become so wanton and extravagant, as even to nourish Sin and Vanity, by what is designed to subdue it. The natural Man, notwithstanding all the Imbellishments Study and Art can give him, will now dwell upon the Surface of Histories recorded in Scripture. He will entertain and please his Fancy with a Multitude of Speculations, raised on all Manner of Subjects. He takes the Scripture for a large Field, in which he may expatiate at Pleasure, and let loose his Imagination upon any Text that comes in his Way: But whilst he neglects the Spiritual *Use* and *Application* thereof, properly tending to the Conversion of his Soul, the Word doth neither enlighten his Understanding, nor sanctify his Will and Affections.

§ 7. Another *false Step* in reading the Bible, is taken by those that look upon the Perusal of the Scripture, as a *meer outward Duty or Task, to the Performance whereof they think themselves obliged by the Law of God, without having due REGARD to the gracious Invitation and Encouragement thereunto, given them in the Gospel.* If there was no Law, they would not mind the Study of the Scripture, nor perhaps any religious Exercise at all. As all the Works of such Men are *soured* by legal Views and Compulsions, so is their reading the Scripture much of the same Nature. They are not born of the Word of the Gospel, and so it is no Wonder they do not taste its Sweetness or Virtue. But such as are born again of the Word, as of a living Seed, do also desire to *grow thereby*, as by sincere, or pure, wholesome and nourishing Milk. To these the Word is sweeter than Honey and the Honey-comb, and more desirable than Gold and much fine Gold. They taste the Power of the Gospel, and are animated thereby, both to a serious Search after the divine Promises contained in Scripture, and likewise to the diligent and constant Practice of such Christian

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Virtues and Duties as depend thereon.

§ 8. Therefore those who read the Scripture upon no better Principle than that of a bare *Task*, *Custom*, or *Constraint*, cannot receive any solid or real Advantage from such a slight Performance. Their Devotion is commonly gone, as soon as the Chapter is ended. As it is barely *Custom* that moveth them; so a Flash of outward Profession, or a little spice of Morality, satisfieth them. They build the Whole of their Religion upon the hollow Foundation of this *dead Formality*, and then flatter themselves into a vain Conceit of *having done their Duty*. Some are herein so punctual and strict, as to perform this Task *Morning* and *Evening*, which they will never omit, unless some pregnant Cause do obstruct it. Some have received this *Customary Way* of Reading from their Ancestors and Parents, and not only keep it up in their own Families, but hand it down also to their Children and following Generations.

§ 9. This *Custom* is often attended with

with many fatal Effects. As it carri-  
eth in it an outward *Appearance of* ~~been re~~  
*Goodness*, so it is apt to make an un-  
wary Reader value himself upon his ~~that~~  
Performance. The worst is, there is ~~eaten~~  
*no living Principle*, no hearty Desire, or  
spiritual Hunger, going along with the  
**Custom of Reading.** The Word is ~~the S~~  
neither inwardly digested, nor any ~~busie~~  
substantial Food afforded thereby to ~~varior~~  
the Mind. No sooner is this speci-  
ous Custom finished in the Morning, ~~the a~~  
but another Scene of Life is opened ~~the S~~  
in the succeeding Part of the Day. ~~run~~  
This is spent in all Manner of Va-  
nity, trifling Conversation, Love of ~~Opin~~  
the World, temporal Concerns, and ~~and~~  
in a Word, in a *State of Carnal Secu-*  
*rity*, without so much as one Thought ~~Figur~~  
turned to what was read in the Morn- ~~The~~  
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Readers widely differ from what they ~~part~~  
appeared to be in the Morning. In ~~some~~  
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ture, or hear it read Morning and ~~certain~~  
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rest there, and not improve what hath been read, is a Piece of dead Formality, and makes the Reader obnoxious to that terrible Sentence: *He shall be beaten with many Stripes.*

§ 10. Another *false Step* in Reading the Scripture is taken by those, who busie themselves and others with the various *Opinions* and *Notions*, both of the ancient and modern Divines upon the Scripture. Such Men as these will run through large Composures, and, with unwearied Pains, search out the Opinion of such a Divine, Father and Teacher, as perhaps made some Figure in that Age wherein he lived. They think they have discovered no small Treasure, when they can quote the Opinion of a great Man upon some difficult Place of Scripture, particularly if he seems to favour some Notion or other to which they are addicted. But as all those Efforts are full of Doubts and Uncertainties, so they leave the Reader just where he was before, that is, in a Sea of uncertain Opinions; it being impossible that the uncertain Notions of Men should beget a certain Faith in God, or

or influence the Mind with a divine Conviction and Assurance.

§ 11. This Way of Reading the Scripture, doth much prevail among such Men as love to be called *Scholars, hard Students, and Criticks* in Divinity. It is generally attended with *Self-Love, Ambition, Ostentation, and other Pharisaical Vices* that lurk under the plausible Pretence of *Searching into the Scriptures*. It swells the Fancy with a World of *critical Niceties, Disputes, and Contentions*. Such a Man will search out all Manner of Intrigues in Reading the Scripture, rather than nourish his Heart with such plain and practical Doctrines as are apparent to every one's View. To him may be fitly applied that of St. Paul: (d) *They desire to be Teachers of the Law, understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.*

§ 12. Much of the same Temper are those that spend the Main of their Labour and Time, about those *difficult Places of Scripture*, which hitherto have

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(d) 1 Tim. 1. 7.

have proved too hard for the ablest Interpreters. Some gather up and compare the Opinions of others, whilst the same bring in their own, and flatter ong themselves they have made such new Discoveries as were not known before. I dare say, 'tis almost a general custom, that People will pry into great Curiosities, deep Misteries, and hard Questions, rather than search into the inward State of their own Souls, in order to have this repaired, Rectified, restored, and born again. The former of these Efforts is mainly a Work of the *Memory*, of the Head and *Fancy*; whereas the latter doth chiefly affect the *Heart*, and the as *Interior* Faculties of the Soul. But after all, such Readers ought well to consider the Saying of a pious Person: *Those that have a Reluctancy to obey the first Elements of the Instructions of God, cannot in Reason pretend he should satisfy them about the nicer Points of his Doctrine, and of the whole Religion by him established.* (e)

§ 13. Another Method altogether insuffi-

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(e) *Ludolf's Remains*, pag. 59.

insufficient to attain the End for which hears the Scripture is given, is the *too general Way of Reading*. Many can read whole Chapters, and delight too in one thing or other which offers it self to their View: But then they never come to a close and *particular Application* of the divine Truth they read. Or if at last they make some Application of the Word, they will make it *to others*, rather than to themselves. Thus they lose at once all the Benefit which else would accrue to their Souls from so sacred an Exercise. The same preposterous Way some will follow in *Hearing of Sermons*. If a Vice be publicly reproved, they are so far from applying the Word to themselves, that they will cast about in their Thoughts to find an Object where to fix it. Such an irregular Hearer, or Reader, is like the *Pharisee*, who thought he did not need to make any Confession of Sin, but might justifie himself, even before God, because he reckoned he was not as other Men were, Extortioners, Unjust, Adulterers, or Publicans. Whereas the best Christian will apply to himself the worst of Reproofs he hears

which hears or reads. He thinks within  
himself :

§ 14. ' Lord, I am guilty before  
thee of all those Vices ! The Seed of  
the blackest and most detestable  
Crimes is lurking within my Breast !  
How many *Heart-Sins*, that never  
shew themselves abroad, do I har-  
bour within me ! What a Brood of  
sinful Desires ! What a Multitude  
of worldly Thoughts and of corrupt  
Inclinations lodge within me ! For  
though Men cannot arraign me for  
those inward Pollutions, yet thou,  
O God, who art a Spirit, and search-  
est the inmost Springs of the Mind,  
findest me guilty of all those Crimes,  
and wilt call me to an Account in  
that Day, wherein the World shall  
be judged in Righteousness. What  
matter is it, how strict I am in the  
Eyes of the World, if thy Spirit  
reproveth me of Sin, and if thy  
Law lays open that Filthiness of  
the Spirit which fosters within, and  
infects my Will and Actions ?

§ 15. In this manner doth a sincere  
Christian apply every Word to *Him-  
self*,

self, before he presumeth to apply ~~it~~ <sup>it</sup> to others. He taketh first himself the ~~universal~~ <sup>universal</sup> healing Medicine of the Word, that <sup>it</sup> may ~~good~~ <sup>good</sup> he may afterwards the more effectually ~~good~~ <sup>good</sup> ally prescribe it to others. It he be in ~~it~~ <sup>it</sup> trusted with a Cure of Souls, either ~~orals~~ <sup>orals</sup> in a publick or more private Cap ~~on~~ <sup>on</sup> city, he doth then the more care fully follow this Method. Minister ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> Schoolmaster, Father and Mother ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> (who have all a *Cure of Souls* committed to them) ought first to apply ~~it~~ <sup>it</sup> to themselves, before they ~~seth~~ <sup>seth</sup> administer it to those over whom they ~~former~~ <sup>former</sup> are set.

§ 16. Another *Mistake* committed in Reading the Scripture is, when ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~Man turns the Scripture into a Book of Moralities~~ <sup>Man turns the Scripture into a Book of Moralities</sup>, and thinks he does enough when, by his own Strength, he endeavours to live up to the same. Such a Reader is not like ever to gain a true Insight into the *Fall of Man*, and his *Recovery* by *JESUS CHRIST*. For as he hath but a slight Knowledge of the various Diseases of Man's Soul, it cannot be expected, he should bear any great Regard to *JESUS CHRIST*, the Restorer of Nature. He ~~thinks~~ <sup>thinks</sup>

ly thinks a little good *Education* and the *Conversation* will fashion him into a *very good Man*, and quite take off what *seem* rude and unmannerly in him. He believeth that *Scripture*-*the Morals* and *Seneca's Morals* are all upon a Level, and he will perhaps *prefer* the latter better than the former, since they are set off with greater *Advantage*, for pleasing a Man's natural *Taste*. A little and slight *Reformation* will go a great Way with him, who *but little* that wants to be reformed. The Whole of his Religion is too much adapted to the *Taste* of the World. And as he squares his Actions by a Set of shining *Moralities*, and refrains from the visible *Pollutions* of the World; so he will be apt to raise his own *Esteem* on the *Vileness* of those that openly *swallow* in the *Mire* of *Corruption*.

For § 17. To remedy this disorderly Way of Reading, a Man ought well to consider, the principal *END* for which the *Scripture* is indited. The *Scripture* is written, not so much to *make us externally good and sober*, as to *make us*

B E.

**B E L I E V E**, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we might have Life through his Name. (f) O as St. Paul expresseth it, the Scripture is to make us wise unto Salvation through Faith, which is in Christ Jesus that the Man of God may be perfectly thoroughly furnished unto all good Works (g) This **F A I T H** in Christ is attended with many marvellous Changes upon the Mind. It is on Man's side the first and original Principle, from whence Abundance of heavenly Operations do proceed. It removeth the Soul out of the accursed Stock of Nature and transplants her into Jesus Christ as a Branch into the true Vine. By **Faith**, a Man is made a new Creature and this enduing him with a willing free and filial Spirit, his Works are thereby rendered acceptable to God since they proceed no longer from **Nature**, but from **GRACE**, the leading Principle of a Christian's Life and Actions In a Word : The **Death** and **Resurrection** of Christ are the great Springs whence

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(f) John 20. 31. (g) 2 Tim. 3. 15, 17.

hence all Christian Morals do constantly flow.

§ 18. Since therefore *JESUS CHRIST* is the *End and Scope* of the divine Scriptures, all our Reading ought to be resolved into him, and into those Effects that proceed from a just Application of his Death and Merits. *a* is the *Lord our Righteousness*, by whose Knowledge we ought to be justified. *(b)* By the Knowledge of his *cross*, we ought to *crucify our Flesh*, with the Affections and Lusts. *(i)* By the Knowledge of his *Death*, we ought to be *planted together in the Likeness* thereof. *(k)* By the Knowledge of his *Burial*, we ought to be *Buried with him* to Death. *(l)* By the Knowledge of his *Resurrection*, we ought to *rise with him* into a new Life, and to *seek those* things which are *above*, *(m)* being *begotten thereby* into a lively hope. *(n)* Upon the whole: For the Excellency of the Knowledge of *CHRIST*, we ought to

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*(b)* Jer. 23. 6. Isa. 53. 11. *(i)* Gal. 5. 24.

*(k)* Rom. 6. 5. *(l)* Ver. 4.

*(m)* Col. 3. 1. *(n)* 1 Pet. 1. 3.

to count all Things Loss and D<sup>u</sup><sub>ne</sub>,  
(o) and ought thereby to escape t<sup>he</sup> S<sup>uff</sup>  
Pollutions of the World. (p) And w<sup>it</sup> h<sup>er</sup>  
can doubt, that the *Morals*, *Manne*  
*Works*, and *Actions*, derived from  
sublime a Principle, are widely dif<sup>fe</sup>  
rent from those that are done by  
mere Heathen, or by a natural Motiv<sup>er</sup>  
For as this latter sort of *Mor*  
descend from so vitiated an Origina<sup>l</sup>  
as corrupt Nature ; so every o<sup>n</sup>  
of them carrieth a Mark of Sin a<sup>nd</sup> rea<sup>l</sup>  
Infamy stamped upon it, and is in n<sup>o</sup> w<sup>ay</sup>  
wise worthy of the Name of G<sup>o</sup>  
*Works* ; nor ought these Morals to b<sup>e</sup> confounded with the Works of a tr<sup>ue</sup>  
and regenerate Christian.

§ 19. Another *insufficient Way*  
reading the Scripture is, when a M<sup>an</sup>  
acquiesceth in some *Flashes or Fits of D<sup>evotion</sup>*, which will at Times start u<sup>p</sup>  
in his Mind. The Scripture contain<sup>in</sup>  
many moving Accounts, whereby  
Man may be wrought up to violent  
Passions, either of Joy or Sorrow,  
Fear or Hope, and the like. Th<sup>is</sup>  
some

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(o) Phil. 3, 8. (p) 2 Pet. 2. 20.

one, when they read the History of the Sufferings of Christ, will be filled with greater and Horror against those who heinously murdered him. When they read an Account of the Joys of Heaven, and of the Happiness of the world to come, they will seem so wonderfully affected therewith, as if they even enjoyed a Fore-taste of that blessed State. In a Word: They will be under a Transport of several Passions succeeding one another, as the reading of the History leads them.

520. But after all, if Things be duly considered, this Way of Reading the Scripture seems to be too *light* and *uncertain*. Any *Romantick* Story dressed up in an affectionate Manner, and set off with such Embellishments as Art and Study can give it, will now then leave the same Effect upon an unwary Reader, and deceive his Fancy into many violent Motions. Representations of that kind are apt to put a Man upon an eager Pursuit of Dreams and Fictions, and even fire Passions with a delusive Influence. whatever may be the Cause of these Passions, 'tis certain, they are at

at the best, but so many *heart* Emotions, that soon spring up, and soon die away again. They blow the inferior Faculties into Hurry and Violence, but do neither enlighten the *Understanding* with substantial Knowledge, nor influence the *Will* with Heavenly Love and Affections. But, after all, we must not suppose that such a sacred Book as the Scripture is, should produce no better Effects than those. As it chiefly relateth to the *Heart* and the interior Faculties of the Mind, so the Operation that proceedeth from it, mainly affects the *Heart*, and the noblest Powers of the Soul. It is *strong* and *lasting*, and diffusing itself through the whole Man, doth gradually transform him into an Heaven Temper of Mind.

§ 21. This Effect, I say, which the Word leaveth behind it, doth not work so much upon the *Fancy* and *Humour* of a Man, as upon the *Will*, and the nobler Faculties. And we ought to read the Scripture with that very

, viz. to have our *Understanding* *lightned*, and our *Will sanctified* by it. Every pondered the Word in her *Heart*: (q) St. Peter bids us to take *heed* thereto, until the *Day-Star arise* in *our Hearts*. (r) The attending to this Word aright, doth *beget* us anew, *lighten* and *convert us*. (s) It maketh *bring forth* *Fruit with Patience*. (t) *Mid* meditated in it, and whilst he *read*, the *Fire* burned. (u) He ob-*eyed* it with his *whole Heart*: It was *camp* unto his *Feet*, and a *Light* *to his Path*; (x) it did not so much *privize* him into some sudden *Com-  
motions*, as *soberly direct* his *Steps* in the *Path* of *Righteousness*.

22. Whoever therefore reads the Scripture with the Understanding only, without any Regard to the Will Affections, depriveth himself of the main Benefit, which otherwise he might reap from such a sacred Exercise. In a Word: The Scriptures must

B be

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(q) Luk. 2. 19. (r) 2 Pet. 1. 19.

(s) Jam. 1. 18. Ps. 19. 7, 8. (t) Luk. 8. 15.

(u) Ps. 39. 3. (x) Psal. 119. 34, 105.

be read both with the *Understanding*,<sup>a</sup> with the *Will* and *Affections*, if e  
the Reader will obtain the *End* <sup>2</sup> *for the*  
which they were indited. This End, <sup>1</sup> *for the*  
hath been mentioned already, is <sup>3</sup> *for the*  
make a Man *wise unto Salvation*, <sup>4</sup> *for the*  
*Faith in Jesus Christ*. And since bo  
Will and Understanding are corrupt, <sup>5</sup> *for the*  
by Folly, and know or perceive nothi  
of the Order of Man's Salvation, <sup>6</sup> *for the*  
want both to be *made wise* by the divi  
Scripture. As the *Word* therefore <sup>7</sup> *for the*  
*lightens* the Understanding, and ston  
it with sound and Evangelical Doctrine, <sup>8</sup> *for the*  
so it ought to form the Will into those  
ready *Compliance* with what the Unde  
standing receiveth. And then <sup>9</sup> *for the*  
doubtedly all the other Affections <sup>10</sup> *for the*  
the Mind, will follow the Directions <sup>11</sup> *for the*  
the superior Faculties, and yield readi  
Obedience to the *Word*. This is the <sup>12</sup> *for the*  
Way to have the *Word* inwardly d  
gested, the inner Man begotten thereby <sup>13</sup> *for the*  
and the whole Concern of Religion set <sup>14</sup> *for the*  
tled on a good and lasting Foundation <sup>15</sup> *for the*  
of Faith, Love, and Obedience, accompa  
nied with a well-grounded and joyous <sup>16</sup> *for the*  
ful Hope of Salvation, of eternal Life, <sup>17</sup> *for the*  
and Happiness.

23. If this *affectionate* and *savoury* method of Reading the Scriptures be neglected, or but slightly regarded, then no Wonder, if in the midst of so much scriptural Light and Knowledge, to which we pretend, we are still blind and ignorant in the substantial truth of Religion. The Reading of the Scriptures barely with the *Understanding*, and at the same Time continuing in an *unsanctified*, disobedient, stormy, refractory *Will*, is one of the Sources of Impiety in this Age, and of those strong Delusions that every where abound. And undoubtedly they will spread farther and farther, and involve us daily in greater Errors, except we prevent it, by proving obedient to the *Word* which we read. The Will inlaved by sinful Lusts, will by degrees render a Man unfit for the Reception of the spiritual Light sent from the Gospel. For this Light shines naturally in a Soul that hath conquered (at least in some Degree) the violent passions arising from *Self-will* and *Self-Lust*, and thereby gained Liberty to attend well to the kind Motions of the divine Spirit.

§ 24. Humane *Reason*, though ne  
so much refined and adorned w  
all the Improvements, Art and Stu  
can give it, will yet fall short o  
true Insight into *spiritual* Matter  
whilst it remains void of the Princi  
of Grace. For an unregenerate M  
how ingenious, polite, and learn  
soever he be, will behold spirit  
Things through a *painted* or fa  
Glaſs, and hug his own Fancies a  
Images, instead of the divine Tru  
of the Gospel. The Reason is, th  
he is destitute of that *Capacity* & *Rea*  
*Fitness*, which is necessary for the Kno  
ledge of *supernatural* and *spiritual* Obj  
jects. Such a Man will, for want  
better Light, commit various Mistak  
in his Application to Souls: He w  
reconcile *Christ* with *Belial*, and t  
divine Word with the Lust of t  
Flesh.

§ 25. All these *sinister Ends*, a  
*false Steps*, that hitherto have bee  
mentioned, must be wholly forsake  
if ever, by the Reading of the Wor  
we design to arrive to a found an  
favoury Knowledge of heavenly thing  
Tru

SIMPLICITY of Heart, that is, sincere and unfeigned Desire to be wise unto Salvation, through Faith in Christ Jesus, is the best Pre-lative the Reader can bring to this Study. And if it be attended with an unshaken Resolution, to order whole Life and Conduct according to the Directions the Word pro- th, then he cannot fail of obtain- the End for which the Scripture is given. In short: This ought to be a man's Design, and whole Concern, that by Reading the Word he may become good, pious, regenerate, and hea- minded; or that he may have whole Mind, Understanding, and Will, possessed with a true and unfeigned sense of Religion. This Christian In- sion being strongly imprinted upon Reader, will inspire all his Thoughts Actions, Words and Inclinations, with Heavenly Mindedness, and direct them to that great End for which the Oracles of God are committed to

26. This practical Method of Read- ing the Scripture, will still prove more profitable, if the Heart be prepared

with a fervent and hearty *Petition* put up for a Blessing upon so sacred a Study. Nay, the Reading it self ought to be accompanied with continual *Prayers*, *Thanksgivings*, and *Ex-  
culations*, for divine Help and Illumination; this being the best way to dig every Truth into substantial Knowledge, and to make us submit our Will to the revealed Will of God. [See some *Forms of Prayer* hereafter subjoined; though the Spirit of God is not confined to one Way of Expression.]

§ 27. The Reading of the Scripture must be attended with serious *Meditation*. For by Meditation a Man beginneth to *taste* the good Word of God, the Apostle expresseth it. (y) And such a truly pious Person delights and rejoices in the holy Scripture, so as to meditate thereon *Day* and *Night*, and more and more to relish the Sweetness of the divine Revelation. *Meditation* is a Mean to suck divine Virtue and Sweetness out of every Flower, where with the Field of the Gospel is strewn. Though it be hard for a Beginner to fix his Thoughts on Objects where

wit

## For Reading the Scripture. 31

they are but little acquainted, cred to wean them from those whereon it have dwelt so long; yet Time and h country will render it easy, and en- d E the divine Law to him, more than umin ousands of Gold and Silver. ' Those o dig hat dig a Well, (to use the Com- Know arison of one of the Fathers) find ur W ill better Water as they pierce deep- See for t into the Bowels of the Earth; and thou ne W ed by Labour and Application, will end forth the Water in greater A- riptu undance. So it is with the Well of edia the Holy Scripture. He that begi searches into it by *Meditation* and d, *Prayer*, will in Time feel the Rivers <sup>of</sup> A Grace stream down into his Heart.'

§ 28. The Holy Scripture is like a tree, every where laden with Plenty of sweet and savoury Fruit: And every verse of it may be compared to a bough, or Branch of the same fruitful nature. Here every Bough ought to be shaken by it self, to try whether any Fruit will drop down into the bosom of a hungry Soul. If the Reader doth not find in one Verse where- withal to sustain his spiritual Life, he

may then pass on to another, and will make Trial of that also. If he do but by earnestly hunger after some spiritual *Relief*, the good Spirit of God will freely supply him with such Food, as shall best suit his present Condition.

§ 29. And after some Time spent in this practical Exercise, the *Difficulties* ~~which~~ that first troubled the Reader, will be happily removed, and the Mind prepared for sweeter Enjoyment. He will go on every Day with greater Success, and will in Time discover in *One Verse* so rich a Variety of whole some Fruits, as will make him even sit down under its Shadow, and fill his Hands with such Fruits as are most agreeable to the inward State of his Soul. But if after all his Endeavours some of those Fruits be still out of his Reach; I mean, if some *Mysteries* contained in Scripture be beyond his present Capacity, he is then to content himself with such as come within his Reach, and leave the rest to another more seasonable Enquiry.

§ 30. God, who is faithful on his Side, will not be wanting to visit the Soul

with various *Probations* and *Trials*, by Means of them give her many *g*htful *Insight* into the most hid-  
Sense of the Scripture. And there-  
the Reader ought not to give over  
Sacred a Study, at the Sight of some  
Difficulties. For as perhaps in for-  
Times he was never used to a  
particular Way of Reading and Medita-  
tion; so at his first setting out in so  
Mind trodden a Path, he cannot but ex-  
pect various Lets and Disappointments.  
constant Exercise, accompanied  
with an humble Mind, and a Will  
contented with the present Measure  
Light, will at last overcome all  
those Difficulties, and bring the  
Reader into a more pleasant and easy  
h

his § 31. As these Books are not pen-  
sured after an *ordinary* Manner, so they  
require a *more than ordinary* Applica-  
tion to understand them. Nor are  
those dark Clouds that seem to hang  
over the Scriptures, unsuitable to the  
Wisdom of the divine Majesty. They  
are proper to create in us *mean Thoughts*  
of our own Abilities, and to convince  
us of the Necessity of a *supernatural*  
Light

Light to direct us. They let us see now how short-sighted we are in the mysterious Method of Man's Salvation, and not how little we understand of what we read, except some Man do guide us; which the devout Eunuch perceiving by his own Experience, desired St. Philip to be his spiritual Guide, in *Acts* 8. 33. And our Saviour hath sent forth the Ministers of his Gospel, to instruct his People in the true Meaning of his written Word.

§ 32. But after all, (to use the Words of a pious Writer) ' there are shining Passages enough in Scripture to light us the Way to Heaven, though some unobvious Stars of the bright Sphere cannot be discerned without the Help of a Telescop. Since God then hath been pleased to provide sufficiently for our Instruction, what Reason have we to repine, if we have in a Book, no designed for us alone, provided also for those that are fitted for higher Attainments, especially since (if we be

## For Reading the Scripture. 35

us be not wanting to our selves,) those messages that are so obscure as to teach nothing else, may at least teach us that humility.

which  
by H. 33. To return: *Prayer* and *Meditation* ought to go Hand in Hand in 8. reading the Scripture. When your meditation goes on but heavily, then exert your leavour to quicken it by Prayer and spiritual application. And when your Prayer doth groweth faint and languid, then recur to *Meditation*, and revolve in your Word and some of those heavenly Instructions the Chapter affords. Whilst you *spiritually Musing*, (r) on the Word, the Fire of Heaven perhaps may kindle, and your Devotion recover Life. Or when an Opportunity offers, to *confer* with some Friend or *Scope* other upon a spiritual Subject, that puzzleth the Mind, it may prove of great Mean to clear up your Doubts, and to some measure revive those Graces that seemed to lie cover'd with the alluvial ashes of Coldness and Indisposedness.

§ 34. Above all Things, be sincere and  
im-

impartial in constant Examination, <sup>exam</sup> your self after the Reading of Scripture. If you read never so much, and neglect the Duty of *Self-Examination*, you are like the Hearer described by St. James. (b) *He indeed beheld his* Face in a Glass, and received some weak Impressions of the Word, but, going his Way, he straitway forgot what an manner of Man he was, and made no further Use of what he had heard. Of as the same Nature were those Hearers mentioned in the Gospel, (c) who having heard the Word, went forth, and being choaked with Cares, and Riches, and Pleasures of this Life, brought no Fruit to Perfection. The Word did not sooner affect their Thoughts, but it was gone.

§ 35. Such a Reader doth not ponder the Word in his Heart with Mary; (d) nor look steadily into the perfect Law of Liberty, by a diligent Search or Meditation; and so he must needs lose the Benefit of his Reading. By Self-Ex-

(b) Jam. 1. 23.

(c) Luk. 8. 14.

(d) Luk. 2. 19.

amination, the whole Nature, Inclinations, Manners, and Actions, must impartially sifted. Not only the outward Actions are to be brought a Trial, but also the *Principle* that produceth them. For as the Law is *spiritual*, (e) so it doth not only require a Conformity of the outward whereto the divine Will, but also of the very Heart and Spirit. Again:

As the Word of God is *quick* and powerful, and *sharper* than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the Dividing between of Soul and Spirit, (f) so a Christian's Examining himself, must not be confined to the Manners and Actions, but reach to the very Springs whence the Manners proceed.

§ 36. A new Life being thus gradually raised by the Word, there is no doubt, but that will influence all the Actions of a Man, and make them conformable to the divine Will. And so is then the Works favour of the Principle whence they flow. If a Man both but faithfully practise what he knows,

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(e) Rom. 7.14. (f) Heb. 4.12.

knows, his Knowledge will certainly increase with his Practice, and his Piety will shine more and more unto the perfect Day. The more he cleanses himself from all Filthiness both of the Flesh and of the Spirit, the more will the divine Light display it self in his Soul, and the more solid will his Understanding prove in the Knowledge of Truth: (g) As, on the contrary, Man that indulgeth himself in a profane Life, thereby darkens his Mind, and instead of an *experimental* and *savoury* (h) Knowledge, gathers in nothing else but a dead and literal Science of the Christian Religion. Who ever therefore despaireth of Success in this heavenly Study, or taketh but a slight and cursory View of the divine Commandments, which are exceeding broad and wonderful (i), may blame himself only, if he do not meet with

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(g) August. Lib. II. Cap. 7. de Doctr. Christ.

*In tantum videmus, in quantum morimur huius seculo; in quantum autem huic vivimus, non videntemus. So far as we die to this World, we see; but so far as we live to it, we are spiritually blind.*

(h) Ps. 34. 8. (i) Ps. 119. 96, 18.

rtain h any substantial Comfort in the  
is Pat usal of the inspired Writings.

37. What hath been hitherto proposed for the profitable *Reading of the divine scripture*, will more fully appear when in these *Plain Directions* here laid down are, a few Instances, applied to the Business in Hand.

First then, the Reading of the scripture must be begun with a hearty Prayer for obtaining that Aid or Assistance, which is necessary for making the most saving Use and Improvement of the Revealed Word. The Reader may use Who is, or any other good Form suggested to him.

#### 4 Prayer before Reading the Scripture.

MOST Merciful God, what Thanks can we return for the gracious Manifestation of thy Will, concerning the great Work of Man's Salvation! Thou hast in thy Word declared the Means to rescue Mankind from the Dominion of Sin and Satan; and how by Repentance, and Faith, we may here

‘ here recover thy Love and Favour and ke  
‘ and hereafter obtain eternal Life and Lo  
‘ and Salvation.

‘ Be graciously pleased to assist me in my企  
‘ with thy divine Spirit, when I am about  
‘ reading thy holy Word. Let him  
‘ enlighten my Understanding, sanctify  
‘ my Will, purifie my Affections, guide  
‘ me into all Truth, remember me in the Souls  
‘ of thy Precepts, shed abroad thy the  
‘ Love in my Heart, quicken me by thy action,  
‘ his Presence, and animate me into a may  
‘ ready Performance of all such Duties which  
‘ as thy Word requireth !

‘ Let him open my Eyes, that I  
‘ may behold the wondrous Things  
‘ of thy Law ; and thy Command-  
‘ ments become more desirable to  
‘ me than Gold, and much fine Gold.  
‘ O let him kindle in my Soul, the  
‘ gentle Flame of a living Faith,  
‘ and then nourish it up with the  
‘ sincere Milk of the Gospel. I be-  
‘ seech thee, O infinite Goodness, to  
‘ prepare me for so happy a State, by  
‘ thy Word, which thou hast given  
‘ me to make me wise unto Salva-  
‘ tion, through Faith in J E S U S  
‘ C H R I S T. Let me rejoice in thy  
‘ Law, learn the Way of thy Statutes,  
‘ and

For Reading the Scripture. 41

you and keep it to the End! Through  
L our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

st m sometimes the following Prayer may  
abou be used.

ORD JESUS CHRIST, who art  
the great and only Teacher of  
my Souls; give me thy Holy Spirit,  
thy the Spirit of Wisdom and Revela-  
tion, that with his own Finger he  
may write in my Heart thy Words,  
which are Spirit and Life.

‘ Grant that I may effectually feel  
the Power of thy Word, for a tho-  
rough and intire Renewal of my Soul.  
Let me be begotten again by thy  
Gospel, as by incorruptible Seed,  
and let the Life of Grace be nou-  
rished up thereby as by sincere Milk.  
Open mine Eyes, O Lord, that I may  
behold the Mysteries of thy Law,  
and may mark, learn, and inwardly  
digest them, for the Good of my  
Soul.

‘ Let me never be a forgetful Rea-  
der; but so read, and meditate on  
thy Word, that my Understanding  
may be rescued thereby from Er-  
ror, my Will from Disobedience,  
‘ my

‘ my Memory from sinful Impressions  
 ‘ my Thoughts from Vanity,  
 ‘ Affections from inordinate Pleasure  
 ‘ and my whole Life from Conforming  
 ‘ to a profane World.

‘ Instruct me in that Wisdom, Heavenly  
 ‘ which is from above, being pure, Sin  
 ‘ and peaceable, gentle, and easy to great  
 ‘ be entreated, full of Mercy and how  
 ‘ good Fruits, without Partiality and ious  
 ‘ Hypocrisy. Thus shall my Soul mad  
 ‘ which is like a lost and wandering great  
 ‘ Sheep, be led back into the Way of hath  
 ‘ Truth, and kept by thy Power dec  
 ‘ through Faith unto Salvation me

‘ Amen.

§ 38. It hath been hinted above, this  
 that the Reading of Scripture is to  
 be accompanied with serious Medita-  
 tion upon what we have read: Like-  
 wise with continual Prayers, Thank-  
 givings, and Ejaculations, as the best  
 Way to convert every Truth into Edi-  
 fication. For Instance, take the first  
 Words of *Genesis*:

*In the Beginning God created the Hea-  
 ven and the Earth.*

*Meditation.*

*Meditation.*

**H**OW great must God be, who by his Word hath created Heaven and Earth !

Since Heaven and Earth is so great, so glorious and beautiful, how much greater and more glorious must G O D himself be, who made them ? He is infinitely greater than all the Creatures he hath produced. The very Heavens declare his Glory, and the Firmament sheweth his handy-Work.

*This Meditation may be thus turned into Prayer.*

**O** Almighty God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth ! I thank thee for having taught me from whence Heaven and Earth have their Beginning. Grant that whenever I view the great Works of thy Hand, I may behold therein thy own Greatness and Majesty. Let me never adhere to the Creature with any inordinate Love, but

‘ but to thee alone, who art the Almighty God to be  
 ‘ mighty Maker of Heaven and Earth, hath  
 ‘ Whenever I lift up mine Eyes to the Years  
 ‘ Heaven, or cast them down toward the Earth, then put me in Mind of Who  
 ‘ this thy Word, that I may duly honour and worship thee, who art the Creator of both Heaven and Earth, partici-

*Or thus.*

‘ **D**EAR God! Since thou art who is made  
 ‘ the Creator of Heaven and the  
 ‘ Earth; thou must needs be better  
 ‘ and more glorious than Heaven and Earth. Therefore let me never  
 ‘ rest in any Creature, but in thee alone, who hast created them all.  
 ‘ Let me never desire any Thing in Heaven or Earth besides Thee.

*Another Meditation upon the same Words.*

‘ **G**OD hath created Heaven and Earth, and all Creatures contained therein. He hath also created *Me*, and fashioned all my Members. How great an Honour is it to

to be the Workmanship of Almighty God ! What he hath created, he hath also preserved. Thousands of Years by the same Word that produced it. And as he preserveth the Whole, he doth also preserve every particular and individual Being.

*A Prayer.*

**A** Lmighty God, thou art the true Father of whom the whole Family in Heaven and Earth is named ; for thou alone hast made both Heaven and Earth. Teach me that I ought to look upon this my Body of Clay, this Lump of Earth, as the Workmanship of thy Hand ; that so I may never abuse it to any Sin, nor prostitute it to sensual Lust and Pleasure, but employ it entirely in thy Service, who hast made, and hitherto preserved it.'

*Or thus:*

**D**EAR Heavenly Father, how is it possible for me to be troubled with anxious Cares and **: Thought**

' Thoughts about the Maintenance § 40  
 ' my Body, which thou hast created  
 ' Strengthen my Faith, O Lord, this is a P  
 ' with a filial Trust I may rely on has a  
 ' thy Fatherly Goodness, and firm and  
 ' believe that thou wilt never leave like  
 ' me nor forsake me. the M  
 Doct

§ 39. According to the preceding and  
 Rules, the Duty of *Self-Examination* where  
 constantly to accompany Prayer and recei  
 Meditation. Self-Examination pre the b  
 pareth the Way for the Practice of what we have read, which is the ver to  
 Crown and Topstone of all our Studie Scri  
 in this Kind. Self-Examination lay confid  
 the Word to the Heart, and the Heart to the Word, and enquiret what Conformity the Heart beareth to the Word. The Word is the Model and Pattern into which the Heart is to be wrought by daily Self-Examination, till the Image of God be impressed thereon again. The A postle speaks of a *Form of Doctrine*, (i) to which, or into which we are delivered.

§ 40. The

§ 40. The Doctrine of the Gospel has a pious Divine (k) expresseth it) has a transforming Power, to change and fashion Mens Minds into the Likeness of it, as the Mould doth the Metal that is cast into it: The Doctrine of the Gospel is the Mould, and the Heart is the Metal, which when melted and cast into the Mould, receiveth its Form and Figure. The best Method therefore to facilitate the Duty of *Self-Examination*, to form *Questions* out of such Places of Scripture as have been read and considered, according to the *Directions* given above. Those Questions, when Man puts them to himself, will make appear, how far the Heart is cast to the Mould of the Word, and how much there is wanting of this divine Transformation of the Mind. But then he ought well to consider, that as the Word is a spiritual Word, the examination which is to be made by man, must be of the same Nature, that is, spiritual and internal, not regarding

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(k) Mr. Burkitt in Rom. vi. 17.

ing so much the outward Act of Duty, as the inward Frame of the Mind, from which the external Performance proceeds. This will more fully appear, when, according to the Place quoted above, [*In the Beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth,* one maketh the following

### Self-Examination.

‘ DID I ever duly consider, from whence Heaven and Earth have their first and *Original Being*; or have I passed over in a careless Manner so great a Work of God’s own Hands? Did I ever admire the omnipotent Power of the Creator, who hath *called those Things which are not, as though they were*, (Rom. 4. 17.) and hath framed the *Worlds by his Word*?

‘ Have I perhaps admired the Heavens more than my Father who is in them? Have I loved the Creature more than God, who made it? Hath the Viewing of the Heavens raised my Mind to *Heavenly Thoughts* and

and Contemplations; and have I even now my *Conversation in Heaven*, where I for ever desire to be?

‘ The Heavens and the Earth had a Beginning, and will *pass away* again in God’s own Time: Have I then duly considered, that my Heart is not to be fixed on Heaven, or Earth, or any perishing Creature, but on God alone, with whom there is no such Variableness?

‘ The Blessed Trinity hath created Heaven and Earth, and *my self* also, who am a small Particle of God’s Creation: Have I therefore remembred my Creator from the Days of my Youth, and humbly worshipped him, from whom I have my very Life and Being?

‘ Have I ever yielded my Members, being Part of God’s Creation, to the Service of Lust and Vanity; or have I constantly used them to the Glory of God, who hath made and preserved them?

‘ Did I ever, by viewing the *Natural* Creation, elevate my Mind to that *spiritual* Creation, whereby a new Heart is created, and a new Spirit is put within us?

‘ God hath made the Heavens, and  
‘ adorned them with Sun and Moon,  
‘ and other bright and glorious Bodies:  
‘ And have not I too often *abused* the  
‘ Light thereof, in sinning ungratefully  
‘ by the Benefit and Direction of their  
‘ Light, against their Creator, and  
‘ mine ?

‘ Hath God created the Earth, and  
‘ all the Creatures contained therein ?  
‘ Truly he created them for no other  
‘ End, than to promote his own Glo-  
‘ ry thereby: Have I always used the  
‘ Creatures to this End ; or have I  
‘ by Pride and Luxury, by Lust and  
‘ Vanity, subjected them still to greater  
‘ Bondage, and thereby frustrated the  
‘ End designed by the Creator ?

‘ Did I ever consider, that as by  
‘ the WORD of God, the Light was  
‘ brought forth out of Darknes ; so  
‘ in the new Creation, a thorough  
‘ Sense of my own Corruption and  
‘ Darknes, must precede the State of  
‘ divine Illumination ? &c.

§ 40. ’Tis certain that by such and  
the like *Enquiries*, a Man may in Time  
learn the Duty of *Self-Examination* \*,  
the

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\* See Short Heads of Self-Examination, for  
the Assistance of those who practise that Duty.

the Practice whereof is so useful in every Respect, and so necessary in Reading the Scripture, that no great Progress in the spiritual Life can be made without it. The divine Writings being *exceeding broad*, and abounding in heavenly Sense, will afford copious Matter for so pious an Exercise. Now and then one Verse will open a large Field for *Meditation* and *Self-Examination*.

All must be concluded again with a hearty *Prayer* for a divine Blessing upon this Work.

*A Prayer after the Reading of the Holy Scripture.*

‘ **O** Infinitely holy and gracious God, I render thee hearty Thanks for the Manifestation of thy Word, and for the Means of Grace therein described, proposed and offered to us. Thy Word discovers to me the Evil of Sin, that hath overspread my Soul; and the Evil of Punishment, which will certainly be inflicted on the Transgressors. Sin hath corrupted my Heart, darkened my Understanding, infected my Will. It hath polluted my Memory, de-

filed my Imagination, raised my Reason against the Obedience of Faith, and hath made me yield my Members Servants to Iniquity unto Iniquity. I have been miserably deceived by thinking my self Innocent, for restraining from grosser A&ts of Impiety: Whereas thy Law diffusing its spiritual Light through my Soul, teacheth me, that all the Imaginations of my Heart are evil, and only evil continually.

Let this Word which I have now read, have a blessed Effect upon me! Let it shew unto me my Fall in *Adam*, and my Restoration in **CHRIST**. Strengthen my Faith, that I may rely on the Word of the Goipel, and be thereby born again into a lively Hope, and cleansed from all Filthiness of the Flesh and Spirit. Let me never rest in an external Performance of a few religious Duties; but grant that I may inwardly digest thy Word, and that the sanctifying Effect thereof may diffuse it self through Soul and Body, Will and Understanding, Thoughts and Desires, Life and Actions.

Enable

Enable me by thy Spirit faithfully to do thy Will, and to establish my whole Religion upon the safe Foundation of thy Word. Have Compassion also upon all those that sit as yet in Darkness, and in the Shadow of Death, and guide them by thy Word into the Way of Life and Peace! Amen.

*Adspirations.*

1. **T**ouch, O Lord, my Heart with a Coal from thy Altar, when I read thy Word. Melt it by the Word of the Law into real Sorrow for my Sins, and then seal it with a Sense of the Remission of them declared in the Gospel.

2. 'O Lord, I am blind by Nature, and altogether unable to find that Pearl of great Price the Gospel proposeth. The Treasure of thy Kingdom is hid under the Mystery of the Cross, and revealed to those only whose Eye is made single by Faith and Obedience.

3. 'O Lord, heal the Eye of my Soul, and give me a spiritual Sight; that I may see the wondrous Things

54 Plain Directions

‘ of thy Law: Heal my Ear, that I  
‘ may hear thy Word, and obey it:  
‘ Heal my Tast, that thy Word may  
‘ be sweeter to me than Honey, and the  
‘ Honey-comb: Heal my Reason, that  
‘ it may prove no longer refractory to  
‘ the Work of Faith: Heal my  
‘ Will, that I may keep thy Com-  
‘ mandments; and heal my Under-  
‘ standing, that I may see the mar-  
‘ vellous Order of our Salvation, ex-  
‘ hibited in thy Word.

4. ‘ As Men do not put new Wine  
‘ into old Bottles, but into new, to  
‘ preserve ‘em both; so grant that I  
‘ may never presume to receive the  
‘ Mysteries of thy Kingdom with a  
‘ corrupt and unregenerate Heart.

5. ‘ Alas! most Merciful Lord;  
‘ the natural Man, such as he is after  
‘ the Fall, with all his Wit and Parts,  
‘ his Reason and Learning, and all  
‘ native and acquired Accomplish-  
‘ ments, doth not receive and em-  
‘ brace, but resist and reject the  
‘ Motions and Teachings of thy di-  
‘ vine Spirit. Let this Consideration  
‘ humble me before thee, O Lord; and  
‘ grant that I may be enlightned  
‘ from above, renewed and born  
‘ again

‘ again by thy Spirit, to apprehend  
‘ spiritual Truths with a spiritual  
‘ Will and Understanding.

§ 41. One that hath never been used to the serious Study of the holy Scripture, which yet is the Duty of all Christians, will be too apt to think, that such a Method as is here before described is very inconvenient, especially for the *Unlearned*, who will find it both difficult and tedious. But it should be considered,

1. That the Difficulty will be lessened by degrees, more and more, as the pious Reader goeth on constantly with this holy and profitable Exercise. The more he is used to it, the better he will be able to perform it. Also he may take some good, pious, and judicious *Commentary*, or *Exposition*, to help him in the Understanding of such Texts as require that Help. Or he may desire Information from his spiritual Pastor, or some other judicious Friend; as hath been already hinted above, in § 31, and 33. The divine Grace and Benediction will not be wanting to render the foregoing Rules practicable at first, and familiar and easie at length.

And

And no one who makes the Experiment will find his Time and Labour lost. But then he must persevere in the Study of the divine Oracles, as long as he lives. So an unlearned Person, of small or dull Capacity, and weak natural Parts, though beginning with slow Understanding and Barrenness of Thought, may, with divine Assistance, improve gradually in Meditation and Prayer, beyond Expectation, beyond all mere humane Probability or Power. Such a one may be contented to meditate and pray at first, with never so few Sentences or Words, till he or she can perform more and better by little and little, taking at first such Texts or Passages of the written Word to meditate and pray over, as are plainest and easiest to their Understanding, before they attempt any that are more difficult. And it is well known, that the most necessary and important Texts are the most plain and easie to be understood. Wherefore no Christian will be at a Loss, to find still such Matter of Meditation and Prayer, in reading the holy Scripture, as will be suitable to his or her present Capacity, Necessity and Use. And in the Choice of such practical

practical and remakable Places of the holy Scripture, good Help is offered in a small Tract, (l) intituled, *Several Methods of Reading the holy Scriptures in private, seriously recommended to Consideration and Use.* Which it will be worth the Reader's while to peruse.

2. Though it may seem tedious, to read in such an exact and slow Method, as hath been proposed, so that one's whole Life time would suffice to read but a few of the sacred Books at that rate: Yet that Objection will fall to the Ground, when we resolve to use *Prudence* in this important and necessary Work. For although such particular Meditation and Application, with Prayer, cannot be allotted to all that is read, it may to such Passages or Sentences, as are most suitable and applicable to the Condition and Circumstances of each Reader; while the rest is only read attentively, in Order as it stands in the several Books. Which Method may well prevent all *Tedium*, and be attended both with Expedition, and with Delight.

§ 42.

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(l) of Mr. Blackwell's.

§ 42. Also it will be very profitable for all Christians that have Families, carefully to keep up the reading of the holy Scripture, as well as all other good and religious Exercises, in their several Houses. Which should be done especially on the Lord's Day. And the Head of each Family will dowell, with the Help of some good and sound Exposition, to explain and apply practically to them under his Care, what hath been read ; giving Leave and Encouragement to Children and Servants, to ask Questions for their better Information, and to make some Observations according to their Ability. So they may improve considerably in Piety and Knowledge; wherein the Primitive Christians were very eminent ; as Dr. *Cave* sheweth in his Treatise intitled *Primitive Christianity*, Part I. Ch. 9. with an Account of their Fidelity and Diligence in studying the holy Scripture themselves, and instructing such young Persons as were under their Care in the Principles of Religion. And pious Parents, Masters and Mistresses, will find it infinitely worth their while, to imitate those faithful and zealous Servants and Disciples of our great Master and Teacher, the Lord Jesus

Jesus Christ. For so they will obtain the Blessing of God upon themselves and their Families, and promote the temporal and eternal Happiness of both.

§ 43. Now it may not be improper, to conclude with a Paragraph or two, out of that celebrated System of Practical Divinity, *The Whole Duty of Man*, Ch. ii.

‘ Fourthly, we are to express our Reverence to God, by honouring his Word ; and this we must certainly do, if we do indeed honour him, there being no surer Sign of our despising any Person, than the setting light by what he says to us ; as on the contrary, if we value one, every Word he speaks will be of Weight with us. Now this Word of God is expressly contained in the holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testament, where he speaks to us, to shew us his Will and our Duty. And therefore to this Word of his, we are to bear a wonderful Respect, to look upon it as the Rule by which we must frame all the Actions of our Life ; and to that End, to study it much, to read it as often as we can ; if it may be, never to let a Day pass us without reading or hearing some Part of it read.

But

60 *Plain Directions, &c.*

‘ But then that is not all : We must not only read, but we must mark what we read ; we must diligently observe, what Duties there are which God commands us to perform, what Faults they are, which God there charges us not to commit ; together with the Rewards promised to the one, and the Punishment threatened to the other. When we have thus marked, we must lay them up in our Memory ; not so loosely and carelessly, that they shall presently drop out again ; but we must so fasten them there by often thinking and meditating on them, that we may have them ready for our Use. Now that Use is the directing of our Lives ; and therefore whenever we are tempted to the committing of any Evil, we are then to call to Mind, this is the Thing which in such a Scripture is forbidden by God, and all his Vengances threatened against it. And so in like manner, when any Opportunity is offered us of doing Good, to remember, this is the Duty which I was exhorted to in such a Scripture, and such glorious Rewards promised to the doing of it ; and by these Considerations strengthen our selves, for resistance of the Evil, and Performance of the Good.

*F I N I S.*